

Listing of the Claims:

1. - 32. (Previously Canceled)

33. (Currently Amended) A method of operating a telephone answering device connected to a telephone line, the method comprising:

answering an incoming call from a calling party on the telephone line;

playing a general outgoing message to the calling party on the telephone line;

responsive to receipt on the telephone line of a code from the calling party, playing to the calling party on the telephone line a message stored in a storage location; and

providing options to the calling party including adding an incoming message received from the calling party on the telephone line to the storage location and replacing the message stored in the storage location with the incoming message from the calling party received on the telephone line.

34. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 33 further comprising, responsive to expiration of a predetermined period of time without receipt on the telephone line of the code from the calling party, recording an incoming message from the calling party received on the telephone line in an incoming message storage location.

35. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 33 further comprising defining a message thread with the message stored in the storage location and the incoming message from the calling party received on the telephone line.

36. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 33 wherein the message stored in the storage location and the incoming message from the calling party received on the telephone line further comprise a message thread.

37. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 33 wherein the step of providing options further comprises the option of deleting the message stored in the storage location.

38. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 33 wherein the storage location further comprises a plurality of storage locations and wherein the code is associated with one storage location of the plurality of storage locations.

39. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 33 further comprising, subsequent to playing a general outgoing message to the calling party on the telephone line, playing a tone to the calling party on the telephone line if the message has been stored in the storage location.

40. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 33 wherein the code comprises at least one dual-tone multi-frequency tone.

41. (Currently Amended) A telephone answering device connectable to a telephone line comprising:

means for answering an incoming call from a calling party on the telephone line;

means for playing a general outgoing message to the calling party on the telephone line;

means responsive to receipt on the telephone line of a code from the calling party for playing to the calling party on the telephone line a message stored in a storage location; and

means for providing options to the calling party including adding an incoming message received from the calling party on the telephone line to the storage location and replacing the message stored in the storage location with the incoming message from the calling party received on the telephone line.

42. (Currently Amended) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 41 further comprising means responsive to expiration of a predetermined period of time without receipt on the telephone line of the code from the calling party for recording an incoming message from the calling party received on the telephone line in an incoming message storage location.

43. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 41 further comprising defining a message thread with the message stored in the storage location and the incoming message received on the telephone line.

44. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 41 wherein the message stored in the storage location and the incoming message received on the telephone line further comprise a message thread.

45. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 41 wherein the means for providing options further comprises the option of deleting the message stored in the storage location.

46. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 41 wherein the storage location further comprises a plurality of storage locations and wherein the code is associated with one storage location of the plurality of storage locations.

47. (Currently Amended) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 41 further comprising means for playing a tone to the calling party on the telephone line if the message has been stored in the storage location.

48. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 41 wherein the code comprises at least one dual-tone multi-frequency tone.

49. (Currently Amended) A telephone answering device comprising:

a control circuit connectable to a telephone line; and

a storage medium connected to the control circuit that stores a general outgoing message and a special outgoing message,

wherein, responsive to receipt of an incoming call on the telephone line from a calling party, the control circuit answers the call and plays the general outgoing message to the calling party on the telephone line,

wherein, responsive to receipt of a code on the telephone line from the calling party, the control circuit plays the special outgoing message on the telephone line, and

wherein, the control circuit provides to the calling party options including storing an incoming message received from the calling party on the telephone line with the special outgoing message and replacing the special outgoing message with the incoming message received from the calling party on the telephone line.

50. (Currently Amended) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 49 wherein the control circuit causes a tone to be played to the calling party subsequent to playing the general outgoing message if the special outgoing message is stored on the storage medium.

51. (Currently Amended) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 49 wherein, subsequent to playing the general outgoing message and responsive to passage of a predetermined period of time without receipt of the code, the control circuit causes the incoming message from the calling party to be stored on the storage medium.

52. (Currently Amended) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 49 wherein the special outgoing message stored on the storage medium and the incoming message received from the calling party on the telephone line define a message thread.

53. (Currently Amended) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 49 wherein the special outgoing message stored on the storage medium and the incoming message received from the calling party on the telephone line further comprise a message thread.

54. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 49 wherein the control circuit further provides the option of deleting the special outgoing message stored on the storage medium.



55. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 49 wherein the code comprises at least one dual-tone multi-frequency tone.

56. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 49 wherein the storage medium is selected from the group consisting of random access memory, magnetic tape and digital storage media.

57. (Currently Amended) A method of operating a telephone answering device connected to a telephone line, the method comprising:

answering an incoming call on the telephone line from a calling party;

playing a general outgoing message to the calling party on the telephone line; and

responsive to receipt from the calling party on the telephone line of a code, playing to the calling party on the telephone line a message thread stored in a storage location; and

replacing at least a portion of the message thread with the incoming message from the calling party received on the telephone line.

58. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 57 further comprising, responsive to expiration of a predetermined period of time without receipt on the telephone line of the code, recording an incoming message from the calling party received on the telephone line.

59. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 57 further comprising, subsequent to playing to the calling party on the telephone line a message thread stored in a storage location, adding an incoming message received from the calling party on the telephone line to the message thread.

60. (Cancelled)

61. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 57 wherein the message thread further comprises a sequence of messages.

62. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 61 wherein at least one of the messages in the sequence of messages has been replaced.

63. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 61 wherein at least one of the messages in the sequence of messages has been deleted.

64. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 57 wherein the message thread further comprises at least two messages.

65. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 57 wherein the message thread further comprises a special outgoing message and at least one incoming message.

66. (Currently Amended) A telephone answering device connectable to a telephone line comprising:

means for answering an incoming call on the telephone line from a calling party;

means for playing a general outgoing message on the telephone line to the calling party; and

means responsive to receipt from the calling party on the telephone line of a code for playing to the calling party on the telephone line a message thread stored in a storage location; and

means for replacing at least a portion of the message thread with an incoming message received from the calling party on the telephone line.

67. (Currently Amended) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 66 further comprising means responsive to expiration of a predetermined period of time without receipt on the telephone line of the code for recording an incoming message received from the calling party on the telephone line.

68. (Currently Amended) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 66 further comprising, subsequent to playing to the calling party on the telephone line a message thread stored in a storage location, means for adding an incoming message received from the calling party on the telephone line to the message thread.

69. (Cancelled)

70. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 66 wherein the message thread further comprises a sequence of messages.

71. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 70 wherein at least one of the messages in the sequence of messages has been replaced.

72. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 70 wherein at least one of the messages in the sequence of messages has been deleted.

73. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 66 wherein the message thread further comprises at least two messages.

74. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 66 wherein the message thread further comprises a special outgoing message and at least one incoming message.

75. (Currently Amended) A telephone answering device comprising:

a control circuit connectable to a telephone line; and

a storage medium connected to the control circuit that stores a general outgoing message and a message thread,

wherein, responsive to receipt of an incoming call from a calling party on the telephone line, the control circuit answers the call and plays the general outgoing message to the calling party on the telephone line, and

wherein, responsive to receipt of a code on the telephone line from the calling party, the control circuit plays the message thread to the calling party on the telephone line, and

wherein, the control circuit causes an incoming message from the calling party to replace at least a portion of the message thread stored on the storage medium.

76. (Currently Amended) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 75 wherein the control circuit causes a special tone to be played to the calling party subsequent to playing the general outgoing message to the calling party if the message thread is stored on the storage medium.

77. (Currently Amended) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 75 wherein the control circuit causes an incoming message from the calling party to be added to the message thread stored on the storage medium subsequent to playing the message thread on the telephone line.

78. (Cancelled)

79. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 75 wherein the message thread further comprises a sequence of messages.

80. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 79 wherein at least one of the messages in the sequence of messages has been replaced.

81. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 79 wherein at least one of the messages in the sequence of messages has been deleted.

82. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 75 wherein the message thread further comprises at least two messages.



83. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 75 wherein the message thread further comprises a special outgoing message and at least one incoming message.

84. (Previously Presented) The telephone answering device as recited in claim 75 wherein the storage medium the storage medium is selected from the group consisting of random access memory, magnetic tape and digital storage media.